

III. Corridor Assessment

URBAN DESIGN AND PUBLIC REALM

The study area for the Corridor Revitalization Plan for Georgia Avenue is approximately 1.6 miles long. For the major part of that length, older retail establishments developed inside or in the front of small row houses characterize the corridor. Residential neighborhoods comprised mostly of row houses line either side of the avenue on a gridded system of streets and blocks.

Two major diagonals, New Hampshire Avenue and Kansas Avenue, pass through the northern part of the study area in Petworth, a residue of the city system of diagonal streets bearing state names. Both diagonals are primarily residential in character, contrasting with the retail development that predominates Georgia Avenue. The intersection of New Hampshire Avenue and Georgia Avenue is also the location of the Georgia Avenue-Petworth Metro Station and has become the transportation nexus of the study area.

Topographically, the avenue rises continuously from the study area adjacent to Howard University, flattens out for a stretch between Girard Street and Church Street and then climbs again as it passes the Georgia Avenue-Petworth Metro Station to a crest at Allison Street. The northernmost part of the study area is generally flat.

Urban Design

The vast majority of lots facing Georgia Avenue are quite shallow, averaging about 75' to 80' in depth. This is consistent with the row house origins of the area when lots were platted throughout the city on similar dimensions. The subsequent transformation of those properties from residential to retail use has resulted in an increment of very small shops fronting Georgia Avenue with little flexibility to expand. Often those buildings have been expanded with a one-story addition to the front of the building, resulting in a very uneven streetscape. Many retail properties never changed the residential configuration of the building front, leaving in place the small set of steps leading up to the front door.

Few buildings in the project area are taller than a standard three-story row house. Some five- and six-story

apartment buildings, such as the Paramount at the corner of Georgia and Quincy Street, exist and are blended well into the streetscape. Most of the storefronts added to the fronts of row houses are one story with the awkward bulk of the residential mass peering out the center of the block. Most recent automobile-oriented development is one story in height.

In general, the buildings of the project area are older structures, mostly built during the expansion of the city northwards in the 1920's. The residential streets are characterized by long stretches of row houses, some with porches, some without, in a graceful rhythm. Some smaller structures were built to serve as retail establishment in the corridor, but by far a larger portion of current retail buildings are former residential row houses converted to retail use.

The shallow depth of the blocks lining Georgia Avenue also limits parking opportunities in the corridor. Few sites are large enough to service the parking demands they generate and recent years have seen the influx of automobile-oriented "drive-in" businesses. Those businesses are found mostly in the Park View/Park Morton neighborhood area and have resulted in a streetscape without definition and in general, poorer in quality as well.

The existing buildings are set close to the sidewalk with generally ten to twelve feet between the building facade and the street curb. This narrow dimension contributes to the vitality of the street life but also makes outdoor retail, such as seating for restaurants, almost impossible.

The Park Morton public housing complex, located between Park Road and Lamont Street on the east side of Georgia Avenue, is the only public housing complex in the project area. It features garden-style apartment buildings and is centered around a cul-de-sac street that eliminated a previous connection to Park Road to the east. The buildings are center-hall apartment buildings of a character diverse from the surrounding context.

To the north, suburban-style development has also made its impact felt, particularly with the development of several drive-in restaurants and gas stations on the west side of Georgia Avenue between Shepard and Upshur Streets. Upshur Street itself is the location of an older retail street east of Georgia Avenue and connects to a former area of light industry to the west. The Petworth Public Library is located on that corner and is a valued public asset.

North of Buchanan Street the detached single-family house becomes the predominant building type with the disappearance of retail frontage. This area contrasts with the row house neighborhoods to the south by having fewer gaps in the street wall.

Public Realm

The construction of the Metro station resulted in the creation of several opportunity sites at the intersection of New Hampshire and Georgia Avenue and the elimination of the tree median in the center of New Hampshire Avenue. Consequently, that intersection, even though located at a major transit hub, is one of the most difficult streets to cross, moving in almost any direction. The unfriendly nature of the pedestrian environment there is exacerbated as well by the large Metrobus staging area on the west side of the street, making the street much wider and resulting in an increase in the amount of time a pedestrian needs to get from one side of Georgia Avenue to the other.

Few parks and public plazas exist along Georgia Avenue in the study area. The largest public park is located at the intersection of Kansas Avenue and Georgia Avenue in the northernmost section. The area adjacent to the Petworth - Goergi Avenue metro station provides for an opportunity for a community space of some dimension, connected with future development.

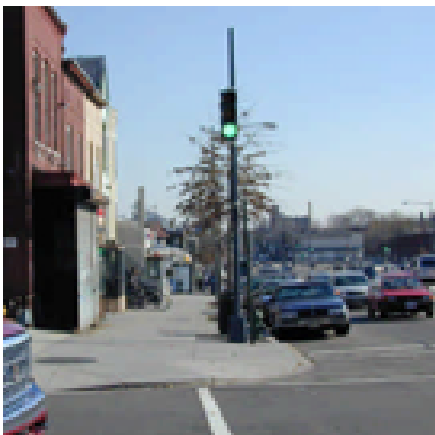


FIG. 23.1 - Discontinuity of the street wall, vacant or abandoned ground level sites, narrow and inadequately landscaped sidewalks contribute to poorly defined a public realm